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SOME POETS OF ILLINOIS.

BY STUART BROWN.

Lawyers sometimes step aside into fields where poppies grow. You know Bacon wrote Shakespeare; at least a lawyer said he did—Illinois can offer John Hay and Brand Whitlock and Edgar Lee Masters as examples.

Poetry is the words in the dictionary dancing ragtime; a day dream set to music; a mental mirage flitting through deserts of facts. Like tobacco it is sometimes a soporific or an excitationer. Like mushrooms it is sometimes edible and sometimes poisonous. It is melodic or it may be spasmodic. It walks, runs, gallops, balks and spins backward. Some poets use iambs and trochees without knowing it. It has as many feet as a centipede.

No one ever defined it—no one ever will. Its exponents do not know why—they simply do; they cannot help it; they break into poetry as a burglar does into a bank with a sledge hammer.

We have had all kinds in Illinois, and why should we not—

Fancy has no bound;
It travels the world round;
Now it's near, now it's far;
Now it skips from Star to Star;
Watches worms beneath the sod,
Then reaches up to God.

There are topics a plenty: The Mound builders; The Indians; The Trapper; hunter, voyageur; The Mormons; The French, Spaniards, English; The Immigrant from every clime; The Great Lake; The great and little rivers; The cyclone; The prairies and the prairie fires; The complex entanglements of the great city and the changeable face of Nature and all the many moods of man and charms of en-

trancing woman. If you cannot get along without the hills and the salt waves, why go dream about them.

You have all seen McCutcheon's picture of the little boy's vision of the corn shocks. Hear what Micah P. Flint, another Illinois boy wrote in 1825, about the Mounds of Cahokia:

"I saw the plain outspread in softened green
Its fringe of hoary cliffs by moonlight sheen
And the dark line of forest, sweeping round.
I saw the lesser mounds which round me rose,
Each was a giant mass of slumbering clay.
There slept the warriors, women, friends and foes,
There side by side the rival chieftains lay;
And mighty tribes, swept from the face of day,
Forgot their wars, and found a long repose.
Ye mouldering relics of departed years,
Your names have perished not a trace remains,
Save, where the grass grown mound its summit rears
From the green bosom of your native plains;
Say! do your spirits wear oblivion's chains
Did death forever quench your hopes and fears
Or, may it be that still ye linger near
The sleeping ashes, once your dearest pride.
And could your forms to mortal eye appear,
Could the dark veil of death be thrown aside,
Then might I see your restless shadows glide,
With watchful care, around these relics dear."

Take a writer of today, Lew Sarett:

"When stars ride in on the wings of dusk
Out on the silent plain,
After the fevered fret of day,
I find my strength again.

Under the million friendly eyes
That smile in the lonely night,
Close to the rolling prairie's heart,
I find my heart for the fight.

Out where the cool long winds blow free,
I fling myself on the sod;
And there in the tranquil solitude
I find my soul—and God."

Yesterday and today are not so far apart. Let me give you a part of an old song written by B. F. Taylor of Wheaton, a "Chicago Journal" man of the sixties:

JUNE DEWS.

"The breath of the leaves and the lyrics of dawn
 Were floating away in the air;
 The brooks and birds were all singing aloud,
 The Violets making a prayer,
 With eyes that upturned so tearful and true
 Like Mary's of old, when forgiven,
 Had caught the reflection and mirrored it there
 As bright and as melting as heaven.

The groan of the wretched, the laugh of the glad,
 Are blent with the breath of a prayer.
 The sigh of the dying—the whisper of love,
 A vow that was broken, are there;
 There dimly they float mid the ripe golden hours
 Along the bright truths of air."

Here is another old one by John Howard Bryant, of Bureau County, a brother of William Cullen Bryant. In this one do you find Bryant or Coleridge?

INDIAN SUMMER.

"That soft autumnal time
 Is gone, that sheds upon the naked scene,
 Charms only known in this our Northern clime,
 Bright seasons far between.
 The mighty vines that round
 The forest trunks, their slender branches bind,
 Their crimson foliage shaken to the ground,
 Swing naked to the wind.
 The sunny noon is thine
 Soft, golden, noiseless as the dead of night;
 And hues that on the flushed horizon shine
 At eve and early light.
 Far in a sheltered nook
 I've met, in these calm days, a smiling flower,
 A lowly aster, trembling by a brook,
 At noon's warm quiet hour.

And something told my mind
That should old age to
Childhood call me back,
Some sunny days and flowers
I still might find
Along life's weary track."

Today the same feeling is expressed in a verse from
Thomas Wood Stevens in

AN INDIAN CHIEF'S LAMENT.

"Across the drifting sands
The drifting snows
Of many winters face
And many springs fill the
Moist shadows
With the gentian's blue,
And deeper sink the trails;
And treaties by my people's
Council fire
Bargain my people's hunting
Grounds away.

There were a host of other singers. I do not call them
minor singers. There are larks, mocking birds and nightin-
gales. Each sings its own sweet song, yet they are different.
However, John Hay came along in the sixties and lifted Illi-
nois poetry into the lime light. Little Breeches, Jim Bludsoe
and Banty Tim will be with us for long. Would you like a
contrast again? The Civil War and the World War were
both fought for freedom. Take one verse from John Hay's
"When the Boys Come Home."

"The day will seem brighter
When the boys come home,
For our hearts will be lighter
When the boys come home.
Wives and sweethearts will press them
In their arms and caress them,
And pray God to bless them
When the boys come home."

And note the difference in atmosphere when you read Carl
Sandberg's verse on "Jaws."

"Seven nations stood with their hands on the jaws of death.
It was the first week in August, nineteen hundred fourteen.
I was listening, you were listening, the whole world was listening,
And all of us heard a voice murmuring:

"I am the way and the light,
He that believeth on me
Shall not perish
But shall have everlasting life."

Seven nations listening heard the voice and answered:
"Oh Hell!"

The Jaws of death began clicking and they go on clicking.
"Oh Hell!"

Rather strong.

Did Donald Robertson have Sandberg in mind when he wrote *The Cannibal*.

"Deep in the Jungle of a city's streets,
With other wild untamable sad things,
A man who might have held high court with kings
Of Thought, roams aimlessly, and greets
Each tardy morning with the smile Death meets
When kissing some defiant skull, and flings
All hope of hope into the wind, that sings
A requiem o'er a world of shows and cheats.
Then in the lonely caverns of the night,
Where weird unholy fancies hoot and caw,
Dark rebels to the primal voice of Law,—
He thinks, and being thus alone, apart
Eats out his palpitating bleeding heart."

You have had some of the dote. I now present the anti-dote.

FAREWELL TO ILLINOIS.

Illinois, adieu to thy flies and mosquitoes,
Thy black, muddy roads, with their soil three feet deep;
I was anxious to gaze on thy beautiful features,
But in parting I feel no desire to weep.

Farewell to thy dark green alluvial ocean,
Thy rank waving tall grass and cattle in herds;
Thy "fever and ague," creating emotion
Expressive of feelings much louder than words.

I passed o'er thy valley by day and nocturnal,
 Thy sun made my head ache, thy moon gave a chill;
 And I now write it down for my friends and the Journal,*
 'Tis my first and last visit, let what happen will.

I had heard of thy beauty, been told of thy treasures,
 Of thy wild game and wild flowers "blushing unseen;"
 I long had been anxious to taste of thy pleasures,
 Forgetting that pleasures were followed by pain.

Adieu, Illinois! and to all thy pale livers,
 Thy lily-faced ladies and yellow-skinned men,
 I entered thee smiling, and leave with the shivers;
 Let other folks love thee, but I never can.

—M. H. JENKS.

*Published in the Newton Journal, 1847.

I have not forgotten Lucy Larcom, Eva Munson Smith, Mrs. Rumsey and Mrs. Cotteau, pioneers in women's song. Nor, Carrie Jacobs Bond and Harriet Monroe who hold a torch high today, with many others like them. I quibble like some lawyers and say they are poetesses. Really, could not some woman speak of them.

Provincial pride leads me to give you a verse from my friend and fellow townsman, Walter Patteson. I have read with rare delight many of his verses that shine bright to me.

NIGHT ON THE PRAIRIE.

(A Memory)

By WALTER LEWIS PATTESON

Night on the prairie!
 Under the canopy of the star-sown sky,
 Touched with the shimmer of the moonlight thrown
 Across wide spaces of the night that lie
 Between the earth and heaven, while adown
 The silver pathway laid of purest sheen,
 Glide silently the spirits bearing gems
 To deck the halls of night's fair radiant queen,
 More brilliant far than royal diadems.
 Night on the prairie!
 Although the earth seems bathed in dreamy peace,
 The air is vocal with the night bird's song
 From some far copse, and never seems to cease
 The chorus of the frogs that all night long,

In deep bass and shrill trebel alternates
Its waves of melancholy sound and keeps
The air a-tremble, while the earth awaits
The coming dawn; the prairie never sleeps.

Night on the prairie!
Across the line of vision flickers bright
Now and again, the firefly's fitful lamp;
The hum of insect life, that stirs by night
Falls on the ear and from vapors damp
That shroud the pool, dim figures seem to wave
Long arms in air as o'er a haunted spot,
Ghosts beckon, clad in garments of the grave
And when we seek to grasp them, find them not.

Night on the prairie!
How often have I seen the prairie spread
Before my eyes with all its nightly train
Of moonlit beauty and high overhead,
The calm stars shining down upon the plain
And heard the wild weird music of the night
Made by the frogs and by the whip-poor-will,
Filling my heart with sadness or delight;
How often now I seem to hear them still.

Now that Eugene Field, the inimitable, and Bert Leston Taylor, that jolly driver away of dull care have gone, there are three men who occupy the present day stage. If I lived in Indiana and were describing them, I should say that Sandberg wrote in blood what he sees in the gutter, Masters with an asbestos pencil etches with blue vitriol on Italian marble.

Lindsay writes with a drum stick while he obtains elation of spirit by clashing the cymbals with the other hand. Lindsay joins to an interesting pen a most wonderful gift of recital. I don't know what the psychology of it is, but if a man should ask you alone to cackle like a goose or bray like an ass, you would probably be insulted. Lindsay can make a whole hall full do these things and they seem to delight in it.

We of Illinois are especially proud of these men who have taken a place of such great eminence in the world.